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ABSTRACT

As part of a competency-based education approach, a module for English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teacher training is presented that aims to increase the teacher's skills in involving learners in needs assessment (NA) and goal setting activities. A classroom NA is a survey of students designed to identify learners' educational needs and goals as wells as skills already mastered. Three training objectives are identified, namely, to enable trainees: (1) to utilize a variety of needs assessment tools for different purposes; (2) to select appropriate tools for the level of the class and the purpose of the needs assessment; and (3) to analyze needs assessment results in order to determine the direction of the class as well as instructional needs. This module contains the following materials: a set of questions on background information; a form for analysis of needs assessment activity; information grids for initial assessment, pre-topic assessment, and mid-course/final evaluation; samples of the mind mapping technique; analysis and application of mind mapping results; a needs assessment tools chart; guidelines for selecting needs assessment tools; and a form for analysis of needs assessment activity. Contains 16 references. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education) (LB)

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ED 367 196

DISCOVERING AND RESPONDING TO LEARNER NEEDS

Module for ESL Teacher Training

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DISCOVERING AND RESPONDING TO LEARNER NEEDS

TRAINING GOAL:

To increase skills in involving learners in needs assessment and goal setting activities

TRAINING OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this module, you will be able to:

1. Utilize a variety of needs assessment tools for different purposes.
2. Select appropriate tools for the level of the class and the purpose of the needs assessment
3. Analyze needs assessment results in order to determine the direction of the class as well as instructional needs.

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DISCOVERING AND RESPONDING TO LEARNER NEEDS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Assessing the needs, interests, and goals of learners is an integral part of Competency-Based Education (CBE) and important in creating a "learner-centered" classroom. Effective Needs Assessment (NA) is vital because adult ESL learners who feel they are not learning what they need to know in English class are often more likely to drop-out than to express their discontent. Eliciting NA information from Limited English Proficient (LEP) adults and applying that information to course planning presents a challenge. Traditional NA questionnaires written in English may not be appropriate or effective for all learners, particularly those with limited literacy skills. In addition, the concept of participating in instructional goal-setting can be strange to adults from other cultural backgrounds who expect the teacher to set the course objectives.

In a typical ESL program, after intake information is gathered and placement testing is done, each learner is assigned to an appropriate level or class. However, within a particular level, each group of learners is different, and the range of skills, interests, and goals within a class may vary widely from individual to individual and from group to group. The teacher, the individual learners, and the class as a whole need to be aware of these differences so that the course can be adapted to the particular group of individuals.

A classroom NA is a survey of students which provides an awareness of the learners' educational needs and goals as well as an idea of what skills they have already mastered. While classroom NA does not measure oral, written, or grammatical proficiency, it may give the teacher an indication of global language ability. The NA process introduces students to the concept of setting goals for themselves and participating in course goal-setting.

Needs Assessment can be done at different points in the course and for a variety of purposes. NA can be done early or midway in the course (**initial, mid-course**) or prior to each unit (**pre-topic**) in order to determine what students already know and to help clarify their goals. Furthermore, it can assist the teacher in selecting, prioritizing, and adapting materials and

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curricula. NA can also be done routinely as part of the course (**on-going**) in order to insure that learner needs and goals are being met. In addition, NA can occur at the completion of a unit or course (**final**) to take account of accomplishments and to help learners make decisions about educational goals for the future.

There are various tools for collecting NA information for classroom use. Many tools can be adapted and used with a variety of student language abilities and levels of literacy. But for NA to be effective, it is important to choose activities which are appropriate for a particular group of students. For example, if reading and understanding the language of a written questionnaire is very time-consuming or impossible for learners, then another type of NA tool should be chosen.

In order to be effective, the NA activities themselves should serve a learning purpose as well as gather information. It is important that neither teacher nor learners perceive NA as a waste of learning time. Effective NA activities can be incorporated into the class orientation or integrated into lessons. Learners can be actively practicing and using the target language while collecting and analyzing data.

If teachers are to attempt to do NA routinely, then the tools must be practical in terms of the time required and the usefulness of the information collected. Many NA activities do not require a great deal of preparation or processing time. The information gathered can and should be tallied and processed with the group so that both teacher and learners become aware of the expectations of others in the class. When there are differences in expressed needs and goals, then negotiation and compromise must occur.

If learners are to understand the purpose and value of NA, the information gathered must be applied in obvious ways during the course. Decisions about course content and direction should reflect the results of NA. Teachers who ask learners to express their needs and goals must also be willing to adapt their teaching so that learners feel that their needs are being addressed. Adults who feel that what they are learning is vital are more likely to complete a course and continue to seek educational opportunities in the future.

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QUESTIONS ON BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. What are some challenges when doing Needs Assesssment?

2. What are some reasons for doing Needs Assessment?

3. How is Needs Assessment different from placement testing or proficiency assessment?

4. List the points in a course when Needs Assessment can be done and explain the purpose for each Needs Assessment.

5. What are several characteristics of effective Needs Assessment activities?

6. How should information which is gathered from Needs Assessment activities be used? Why?

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FORM FOR ANALYSIS OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT ACTIVITY

1. Did the instructor demonstrate the NA tool(s) used? YES NO

Which ones?

___ Information Grid

___ Brainstorming (List, Mind Mapping, Cut-outs)

___ Questionnaire (Inventory, Checklist, Scale, Progress Report, Pictorial)

___ Topic Selection (Priority Cards, Vote with Feet)

___ Timeline (Written, Pictorial)

___ Achievement Chart (Bulletin Board, Diary Chart)

___ Reading/Writing Samples (Self-Selection, Composition)

___ Dialog Journal

2. At what point in the course was NA used?

___ Initial
___ Mid-Course
___ Pre-Topic
___ On-going
___ Final

3. Indicate the purpose(s) of the NA activity.

___ Determine previous knowledge/skills
___ Clarify goals/needs
___ Select skills/topics/course objectives
___ Prioritize skills/topics/course objectives
___ Adapt materials/curricula
___ Take account of accomplishments

4. Was the NA activity appropriate for the class? YES NO

How?

___ Appropriate for language level

___ Appropriate for literacy level

5. Did the NA activity serve a learning purpose? YES NO

How?

___ Allowed for practice or review of classwork

___ Allowed for student interaction using the target language

6. Was the NA activity practical? YES NO

How?

___ Materials preparation time was feasible

___ Administration time did not outweigh value of information gathered

___ Processing could be done within the class time

7. Were the results of the NA clear? YES NO

How do you know?

___ Individual learners could explain their responses

___ The class as a whole was able to process the responses together

___ Teacher was able to quantify or summarize the learner responses

8. Did the teacher explain how the information was to be used? YES NO

How?

___ To select topics/life skills

___ To select enabling skill areas

___ To set personal goals

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INFORMATION GRIDS

Information grids can be used at all levels and for initial, pre-topic, and mid-course/final assessment. They can be used with a variety of topics and can be created by the teacher and/or the learners.

1. **INITIAL ASSESSMENT**

A. **Getting to know the learners**

Name	Native Country	Studied in High School	Studied English Before	Came to the U.S.

Instructional implications: Learning styles, classroom experience, literacy level, mastery of basic survival skills.

B: **Survival Skills Assessment:** (Do you _____?)

Have a Bank Account	Have a Driver's License	Have a Job	Use Public Transportation (What Kind?)	Have Health Insurance

Instructional implications: Mastery of Survival Skills

2. **PRE-TOPIC ASSESSMENT: Shopping**

Where do you shop for food?	Do you buy food on sale?	How do you find out about sales?	Do you use food coupons?	Do you speak English at the supermarket?

Instructional implications: Mastery of Consumer Strategies

3. **MID-COURSE/FINAL EVALUATION: Likes and Dislikes**

	Textbook	Small Group Work	Roleplays	Civics
Like				
Dislike				

Instructional implications: Students' perception of instructional activities, learning styles

Suggested Instructional Steps:

- Depending on the learners' level, practice/teach the questions that the learners will need to ask each other. The grid boxes can contain the complete questions or cue phrases.
- After doing an example using yourself or a learner, learners interview each other and record answers.
- Depending on the size of the class, results can be tabulated on a master grid on the blackboard or tallied orally.
- Follow-up: Depending on the learners' level, processing questions of varying difficulty can be asked.

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TASK 1: ANALYZING INFORMATION GRID RESULTS

The following information was collected from an intermediate level class in a General Lifeskills Program.

Pre-topic Assessment: Occupations

What was your occupation in your native country?	What is your occupation now?	Would you like a different job?	How did you hear about your current job?
Farmer	Cleaning	Yes	Sister
Homemaker	Cashier	Yes	Friend
Pharmacy clerk	Babysitter	Yes	Church Secretary
Geologist	Restaurant worker	Yes	Phone book
Computer Instructor	Salad Person	Yes	Husband
Student	Unemployed	Yes	-----
Fisherman	Unemployed	Yes	-----
Farmer	Amtrack Painter	No	Friend
Student	Room Service	Yes	Brother

Instructions: Study the information on the grid. Analyze the results and identify the instructional needs of the learners.

Information to be tallied and analyzed	Results/What do the results tell you about the learners?	Instructional needs
1. How many learners are currently employed?	7 out of 9 / a working population, previous experience with work	Learners need on the job skills, eg. following instructions.
2. How many learners have the same job as in their countries?		
3. How many learners would like a different job?		
4. How many heard about their current jobs through family and friends?		

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What other data might you want to tally and analyze from the above grid?

2. What other information might you want to elicit in order to set instructional objectives?

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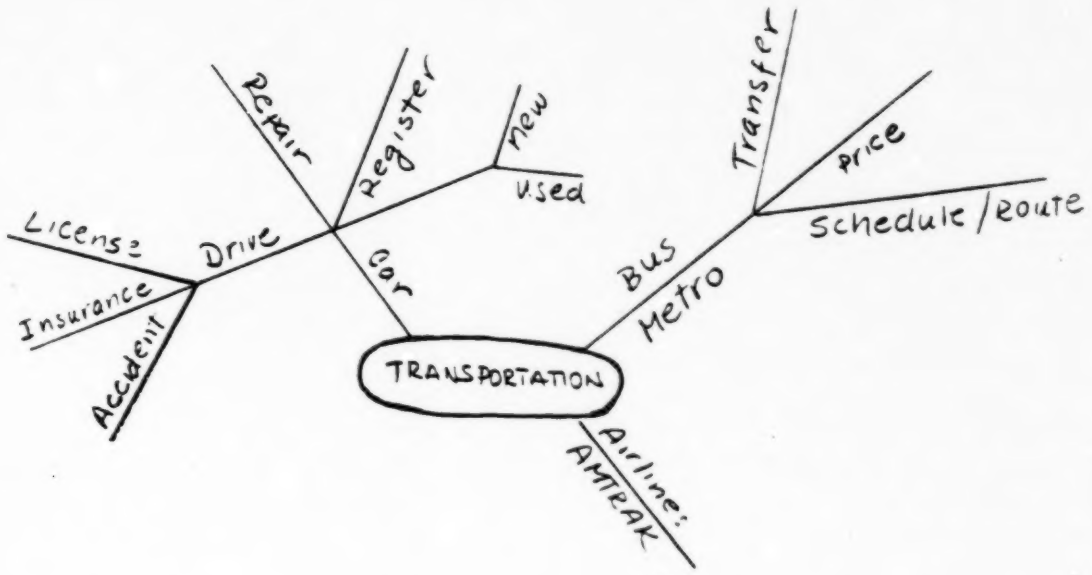
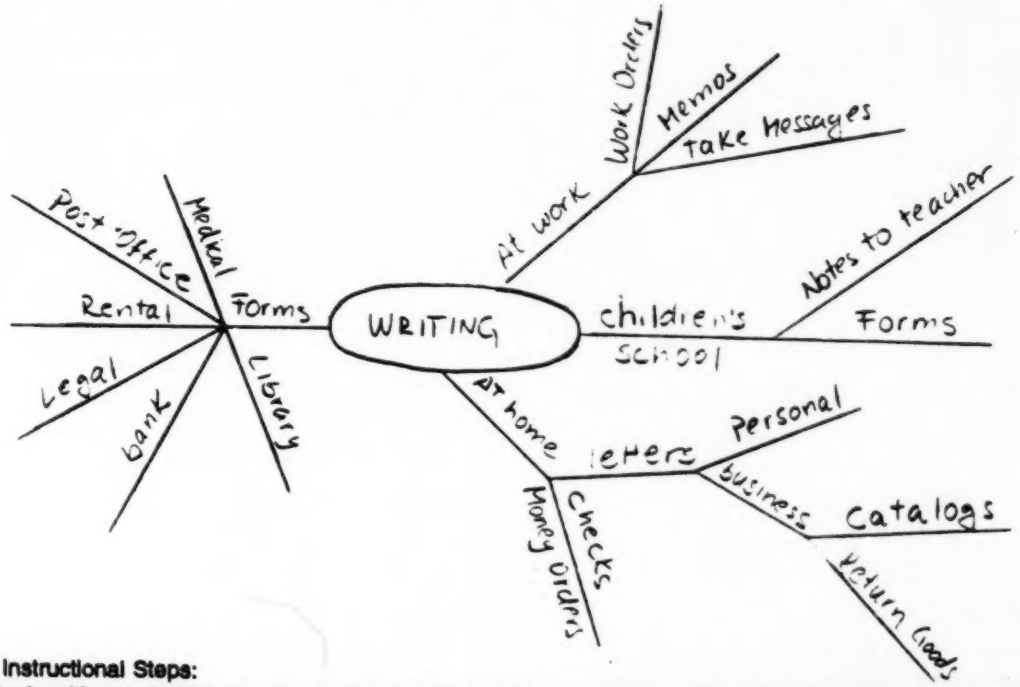
MIND MAPPING TECHNIQUE: SAMPLES

Mind mapping is a very versatile needs assessment tool. It can be used with beginning, intermediate, advanced, and multi-level classes and at various points throughout the course.

TOPICAL



SKILL



Suggested Instructional Steps:

- Begin with one topical question depicted at the center of a diagram. The class brainstorms answers to the central question, learners' responses, and more detailed related examples are added to the diagram and drawn as branches emerging from the center.
- To finish, a count is taken of those who agree with each answer, and the tally is written on the branch.

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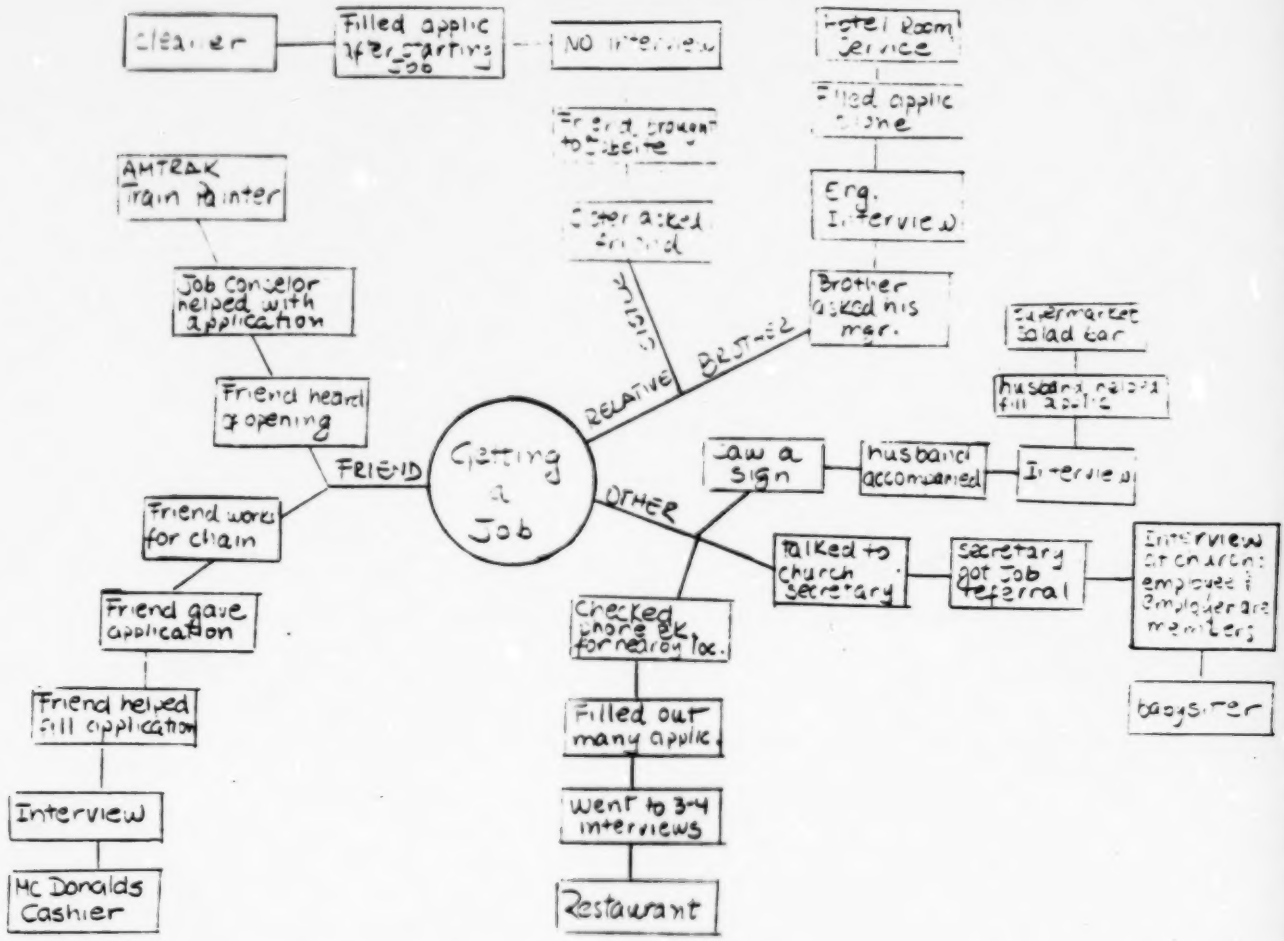
TASK 2: ANALYZING AND APPLYING MIND MAPPING RESULTS

Instructions: Study the information on the mind map. Analyze the results and state the instructional needs.



Information to be tallied/analyzed	Results	Instructional needs
1. How many learners used newspaper ads to find out about the jobs?	0 out of 7	Need to work on reading job announcements
2. How many learners filled out a job application?		
3. How many learners had an interview?		
4. How many learners got their jobs unassisted by a friend, relative, or counselor?		

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NEEDS ASSESSMENT TOOLS CHART

TOOL	LOGISTICS	PURPOSE	ANALYSIS	LEVEL
Information Grid	Learners interview each other to complete the grid. Topics and headings for grids are generated by the teacher and/or the learners.	Initial, pre-topic, mid-course, and final information about the learners and their experiences, needs, and preferences. Grids can be adapted for various levels by controlling language or using pictures for low literacy learners.	Results can be tabulated orally or on a master grid on an overhead or blackboard. If appropriate to the grid, the group prioritizes skills and topics to be covered.	Low Lit, Beg, Inter, Adv
Brainstorming 1. Learner-generated list	1. Small groups (or the whole class) generate lists of how they use skills, eg. Where do you speak English? What do you write?	1. Initial and on-going information about how learners use basic skills.	1. The list may be used to create a questionnaire that individuals complete. The questionnaires can be tallied orally as a group. Identified needs can be prioritized.	1. Beg, Inter, Adv
2. Mind Mapping	2. Beginning with a topical question at the center of a diagram, the class brainstorms answers. Learners' responses and more detailed examples are added to the diagram and drawn as branches emerging from the center.	2. Initial and pre-topic information about how learners use basic skills and life skills in a variety of settings and how they would like to be able to use skills.	2. A count is taken of how many learners agree with each branch (i.e. need). Identified needs can be prioritized as a group.	2. Beg, Inter, Adv
3. Cut-out illustrations	3. Learners cut pictures from magazine of things they would like to be able to do with English.	3. Initial and mid-course information about how learners use or want to be able to use English.	3. Individuals show and explain pictures to the group. Teacher keeps a tally of expressed need.	3. Low Lit, Beg

TOOL	LOGISTICS	PURPOSE	ANALYSIS	LEVEL
Questionnaires				
1. Written Questionnaires a. Inventory: list of how language and literacy skills are used b. Checklist: list of topics and skills c. Scale (rating/frequency): ranking of the importance of skills, topics, or language & literacy uses d. Progress Report: list of competencies and/or skill areas to be covered	1. a & b. Tools can be generated by teachers or by the learners in a group brainstorming session. Learners complete the surveys individually. 1. c. Teacher provides the content for the scale. Learners individually rank items or indicate frequency of use. 1. d. Learners individually check off areas of need/interest on the class progress report.	1. Initial, pre-topic, on-going, and final assessment of needs and preferences related to language skill, life skill, and topics. Note: Written Questionnaires can also be used for self-assessment.	1. Results can be tabulated orally as a group on an overhead or the blackboard. The group discusses the results and prioritizes skills and/or topics to be covered.	1. Beg, Inter, Adv
2. Pictorial Questionnaire	2. Teacher provides pictorial worksheets. Learners mark the appropriate pictures.	2. Initial and mid-course information about places learners want to be able to use English.	2. The class tallies the questionnaire together.	2. Low Lit
Topic Selection	Learners are given a list or a collection of visuals indicating skills, topics, or subtopics either specified by a curriculum or developed by brainstorming.	Initial, mid-course, or pre-topic information about learners' highest priority needs with regard to competencies, skills, and topics.	Teacher and class become aware of high priority needs. Together they negotiate the selection and ordering of the course content.	Low Lit, Beg, Inter, Adv
1. Priority Cards	1. Individuals or small groups create cards, each containing one skill or topic. The cards are placed in order according to importance.		1. Individuals or small groups report their top priorities and the class reaches a consensus.	
2. Vote with Your Feet	2. Names or pictures of skills or topics are posted around the classroom, and individuals move to stand near the most important choice. Several rounds of voting may occur.		2. At each round of voting, teacher counts learners who chose a particular skill or topic. A class consensus is reached.	

TOOL	LOGISTICS	PURPOSE	ANALYSIS	LEVEL
Timelines 1. Written Timeline 2. Pictorial Timeline	Learners make timelines which indicate major events in their lives (past and present). They also indicate future goals. 1. They include the year and a sentence or two for each event. 2. They draw images to reflect major events in their lives.	Initial information about learners' lives (past and present) and their goals for the future. As a final evaluation, learners indicate progress toward the achievement of their goals. Note: Timelines can also be used for self-assessment.	Information can be used to tailor the class toward helping learners achieve their future goals. Teacher becomes more aware of learners' backgrounds. Class discussion should focus on the learners' goals and how the class can help them attain their goals.	1. Inter, Adv 2. Low Lit, Beg
Achievement Charts 1. Class Bulletin Board What do you want to learn? What have you learned in class? 2. Individual Diary Chart This week I used English: Where? With whom? This week I wanted to use English: Where? With whom?	1. Set up a bulletin board with columns across; one for each question. Learners update what they have learned on a regular basis. eg. weekly. 2. Learners complete chart on a regular basis, eg. weekly.	Appropriate for classroom as well as individualized instruction, such as in a Learning Center. 1. Initial information about previous learning and learning goals. On-going information about learners' self-evaluation of accomplishments. 2. On-going information about achievements as well as lifeskill and basic skill needs. Note: Diary charts can also be used for self-assessment.	Teacher reads what learners have written and adapts course objectives, as appropriate 1. Learners read and share their goals and successes.	Inter, Adv

TOOL	LOGISTICS	PURPOSE	ANALYSIS	LEVEL
Reading/Writing Samples 1. **Self Selection** of reading by topic/level	1. Teachers provide a variety of reading materials at different levels. The learners select the level and topic that they would like to read.	1. On-going information about topics of interest as well as reading level that the learner feels comfortable with.	1. Teachers can select materials that reflect the levels and interests of individual learners and/or the class.	1. Beg, Inter, Adv
2. **Composition** based on reading samples written by other learners which describe their experiences learning English and their needs and/or progress toward goals.	2. Learners read samples, answer questions about the reading, and then write a similar composition.	2. Initial, on-going and final information about level of comprehension and ability to write following a model; information about learner goals, expectations, and self-analysis of progress.	2. Class considers other learners' experiences and can compare to their own. Teacher can tailor the class to specific needs/goals.	2. Inter, Adv
Dialog Journals	Teachers and learners correspond on a regular basis via a written journal. Teacher can ask learners to respond to specific questions in their journals, eg. What would you like to learn in this class? What did you like best about class this week? What do you still need to learn? The activity can be adapted to varying levels by controlling the language of the questions and of the responses expected.	Initial, on-going, final information about learners' learning needs and preferences.	Teachers can respond to individual learners about their needs, goals, and preferences and adapt the course, as appropriate.	Inter, Adv

TASK 3: SELECTING NEEDS ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Instructions: Your workshop facilitators will select scenarios based on the participant needs assessment you completed at the beginning of the workshop. Study the scenarios and select an appropriate tool from the Needs Assessment Tools Chart. You may suggest tools not listed on the chart. Discuss why you chose a particular tool, how you would set the activity up (i.e. logistics), and what you would hope to learn from the activity (i.e purpose).

Example 1: It is the first week of beginning level class in a General Lifeskills English program. Your students have some oral proficiency but very limited literacy skills. You would like to elicit information about their lives and their goals for the future.

Example 2: It is the first week of class. You teach an advanced Family Literacy class and would like to assess how they would like to be able to use English in order to participate more in their children's education.

SCENARIOS

1: You teach an intermediate class that has a set Competency-based curriculum to follow. At mid-course, you realize that you will not be able to complete all of the competencies. You want the students to prioritize the remaining topics.

2: It is the first week of beginning level class in a General Lifeskills English program. Your students have some oral proficiency but very limited literacy skills. You would like to elicit information about places they want to be able to use English.

3: You teach in a beginning level class in a General Lifeskills English program. You are just about to start a unit on "Health". You would like to elicit information about their health care habits (eg. eating habits, health insurance, etc.)

4: You teach an intermediate level Workplace Literacy class. The learners have expressed an interest in working on writing. You would like to know what specific tasks require writing on their jobs.

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TASK 3: SELECTING NEEDS ASSESSMENT TOOLS (continued)

5: You teach an advanced level class and would like to elicit information about learners' accomplishments, goals, and preferences on an on-going basis.

6: It is the first week of an intermediate class in a General Lifeskills English program. You would like to elicit information about the learners' lives and their goals for the future.

7: You are teaching a multi-level class and have no curriculum. You would like to get information about the learners' goals with regard to English.

8: You teach a grammar-based curriculum but would like to contextualize the grammar points. You would like information on what topics interest your advanced level learners.

TASK 4: APPLICATION

Choose a needs assessment activity that you could use next week in class. The type you choose (initial, mid, pre-topci, on-going, or final) will depend on where you are in the semester. Share your activity with your group. Discuss why you chose a particular tool, how you would set it up (logistics), and what you hope to learn from the activity (purpose).

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FORM FOR ANALYSIS OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT ACTIVITY

1. Did the instructor demonstrate the NA tool(s) used? YES NO

Which ones?

___ Information Grid

___ Brainstorming (List, Mind Mapping, Cut-outs)

___ Questionnaire (Inventory, Checklist, Scale, Progress Report, Pictorial)

___ Topic Selection (Priority Cards, Vote with Feet)

___ Timeline (Written, Pictorial)

___ Achievement Chart (Bulletin Board, Diary Chart)

___ Reading/Writing Samples (Self-Selection, Composition)

___ Dialog Journal

2. At what point in the course was NA used?

___ Initial
___ Mid-Course
___ Pre-Topic
___ On-going
___ Final

3. Indicate the purpose(s) of the NA activity.

___ Determine previous knowledge/skills
___ Clarify goals/needs
___ Select skills/topics/course objectives
___ Prioritize skills/topics/course objectives
___ Adapt materials/curricula
___ Take account of accomplishments

4. Was the NA activity appropriate for the class? YES NO

How?

___ Appropriate for language level

___ Appropriate for literacy level

5. Did the NA activity serve a learning purpose? YES NO

How?

___ Allowed for practice or review of classwork

___ Allowed for student interaction using the target language

6. Was the NA activity practical? YES NO

How?

___ Materials preparation time was feasible

___ Administration time did not outweigh value of information gathered

___ Processing could be done within the class time

7. Were the results of the NA clear? YES NO

How do you know?

___ Individual learners could explain their responses

___ The class as a whole was able to process the responses together

___ Teacher was able to quantify or summarize the learner responses

8. Did the teacher explain how the information was to be used? YES NO

How?

___ To select topics/life skills

___ To select enabling skill areas

___ To set personal goals

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